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The Mindszenty Story:

By Josef Cardinal Mindszenty
As Told to Father Josef Vecsey

Cardinal Mindszenty told this story to Father Vecsey in several long conversations. The paragraphs in parentheses are connective, explanatory or descriptive passages added by Father Vecsey.

THERE was a tank in front of us leading the way and another behind us. The weather was fair and I rode in the open front of a troop carrier. Everywhere along the way the people had heard we were coming and had run to kneel or stand by the roadside and wave flags at me that I should bless them. Several times we stopped and I shook hands with people I had not seen for eight years and blessed them all.

The Hungarian soldiers who were driving me, the officers and enlisted men alike, were full of hope and enthusiasm. In the early morning, before dawn when we started our journey from their barracks at Retsag, I couldn't help smiling at them, teasing them a little. "Well, my children," I had asked them, "what guarantee can you give me that you will take me to Budapest, that we will reach Budapest safely?"

At this the young soldiers grew very serious. "Nothing but our lives."

These were the same soldiers who had taken me from the Castle at Felsopeteny where I was a prisoner of the Bolsheviks and who had brought me the night before to their barracks in Retsag.

We had arrived at the barracks in the late afternoon of Oct. 30 and decided then to wait until morning before driving about 60 kilometers to Budapest. The tanks could not go very fast and the

THE Rev. Josef Vecsey, to whom Cardinal Mindszenty told his story, was born in a Hungarian village less than five miles from the Cardinal's home at Cseh-mindszent. The families were close friends. From the age of 10, Father Vecsey was a frequent visitor at the Cardinal's home.



Now 43, Father Vecsey says that it was largely the Cardinal's influence which decided him to become a priest. After Father Vecsey's own parents died, the Cardinal, then a young priest, would often visit his home and act as spiritual adviser to the younger man.

Father Vecsey studied at the seminary at Budapest, was ordained in 1938 and remained in Budapest another year to take his doctorate in theology. Then, as the Cardinal's protegee, he was assigned as curate to the parish where the Cardinal was pastor.

After the Cardinal was jailed in 1948, Father Vecsey cared for his mother,

Mrs. Pehm. He also begged the government for permission for her to visit her son. When that permission was finally granted, he accompanied the mother on many of her trips to the prison, although he himself was not permitted to see the Cardinal.

Then the theological seminary where he was teaching was disbanded by the communists. Because of his association with the Cardinal, he found that he was marked for arrest. In 1952 he fled Hungary.

For two years, then, he studied in Rome. In 1954 he became religious adviser to the Hungarian desk of Radio Free Europe at Munich. In February, 1958, he went to Vienna to begin a compilation of the sermons and writings of Cardinal Mindszenty.

When the revolution broke out, he went to Hungary. "My feeling was that the exile had ended," he said. At the Cardinal's residence in Budapest, he was received with open arms. For the next two days, he never left the Cardinal's side except to sleep. The Cardinal told him the story of his arrest and imprisonment.

When the revolution appeared doomed, Father Vecsey was obliged to return to the free world. He took with him full written authorization to tell his story.

soldiers believed that for safety I should have their escort all the way into the city because there was still much shooting in the country. I paid a short visit to the pastor of the town and then went back to the barracks where the soldiers were fixing dinner.

The soldiers asked me if it was true that I had been sick and had been cared for in a convalescent home. I told them

that Rakosi (deposed Communist boss of Hungary) had started these rumors and, for the first time in connection with me, he had told even a half truth. It was true that I had been very sick but not one word was true about the convalescent home.

As we talked, the news of my liberation reached the neighboring villages and hundreds of people came to the bar-

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